



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## WHERE THE BEST ENGLISH IS SPOKEN

THE construction of the English language, that is the English language as it is written, has not changed much during the last two hundred years, in fact very little for three hundred years. To be sure there has been a change in the spelling of words, many words have become obsolete, and many new ones have been added, but the general arrangement of the English sentence has not undergone any material change since the settlements of Jamestown and Plymouth. I fancy, however, that if the manner of inflection, the pronunciation, the spoken English of the Englishmen who lived three centuries ago could be arrived at, it would sound odd indeed. If the New Englander of today could hear the voices of Winthrop, Roger Williams, and Cotton Mather, I doubt if they would have the Bostonian sound. Nor do I think the spoken English of John Smith's time would have much resemblance to that spoken today by the first families of Virginia. For that matter the pronunciation of John Adams and Josiah Quincy, of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson must have been very different from that of the present Bostonian or Virginian.

Before the introduction of the printing press, and a general diffusion of literature, it seems that the written English adjusted itself from time to time to correspond with the ever-changing spoken English, but with the literature of Shakespeare and Bacon and Milton came the printing press, and the works of Addison and Swift a century later showed some changes, but now for two centuries the "Spectator" and the "Tale of the Tub" have been standards of good English. One would think that with the good English given us by the prose writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which has been so universally accepted by the English speaking people ever since, with Johnson's dictionary given to us at the same time, that there should not have been much change in spoken English, but that we ought rather to have gotten together in accordance with the standards. Such,

however, is not the history of the language. Dialects, not in the technical sense, but as the term is popularly used, have thriven both in England and America. Dr. Emerson in his *History of the English Language* says that "In Britain alone there are six important dialect divisions, without including Wales or the Highlands of Scotland." The dialect divisions given are the southern, the midland, the eastern, the western, the northern, and the lowland of Scotland. As to England proper a more general classification would be the southern, included within the counties bordering on the southern coast, the midland, included within the counties lying north of the Thames, perhaps to the latitude of Birmingham, embracing London and the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and the northern, including all counties lying north to Scotland.

In the extreme southern portion of England the initial h is usually pronounced, and the letter has its usual sound. Vowels are not drawled as in North England or Scotland. The letter f is usually pronounced as v, and s as z. A good example of extreme South England's spoken language is the poetry of Barns written in the Dorset dialect.

The North England very much resembles the Scotch. All classes trill the letter r, especially where it precedes a vowel sound. Many vowels are drawled, or given a double sound. As neow for now, bean for been, maake for make, and the like. The initial h is generally dropped, especially by the peasantry.

Perhaps the best English spoken in England is the language of that section lying north and east from Oxford and London. Here are the great universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and here have lived most of England's literary men. Even in this part of England it is only the cultured classes who have not the h difficulty. The initial h is not only dropped, but more frequently than elsewhere in England the aspirant is prefixed where it should be omitted. Although the difficulty in the pronunciation of the aspirant does not extend to the cultured classes, unless perhaps occasionally in such words as which and what, nevertheless many educated persons in and about Cambridge and Oxford have fallen into errors quite as bad. For

example, they do not give the letter *r* a uniform sound, and many educated men of society, and unfortunately they are growing in number, have disgraced the Queen's English with their "deont you kneow." It is in this part of England, however, that the correct broad vowel sounds of the language are best preserved. It is in this part of England that the American traveler finds the nearest approach to the speech this side of the Atlantic.

In the popular sense of the term "dialect," there are in the United States not fewer than three distinct dialect divisions, the New England, the southern, and the western. There might be added the mountain dialect of the mountain country of the Virginias, Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina, the Cracker of Georgia, and the Creole of Louisiana. The dialects of the mountain people, the Crackers, and the Creoles are dialects of uneducated people, while the dialects of New England, the South, and West appear in the spoken English of the cultured.

Among the uncultured classes of New England the drawl or double sounding of some vowels is one of the most noticeable peculiarities. For example, the untutored New Englander says *ceow*, *neow*, *cean*, *ceandidate*, and the like. We find here some similarity to the dialects of North Britain; but not so much as is supposed before investigation. The New England dialect as spoken by its uncultured is well illustrated by the "Bigelow Papers," though the drawling of vowel sounds is not spelled into the words. This is perhaps due to the fact that at the time Lowell wrote the papers this peculiarity was almost as common among the educated as the uneducated, and Lowell was either unconscious of the peculiarity, or thought it unnecessary to spell into words their ordinary pronunciation.

Among the cultured classes of New England the error of drawling vowel sounds has been partially corrected, but they have fallen into another error equally as bad in the misuse of the consonant *r*. The *r* difficulty is much more noticeable in New England than in any part of Britain. The New England scholar persists in saying *wuhd*, *wuhk*, *wuhld*; and the final *r*, in words like *or*, *far*, *jar*, *tar*, *her*, *fir*, and the like, is never sounded, but a

sound akin to ah is given instead. This is not because of any physical difficulty, because they just as persistently add the final r where it does not belong. Our educated Bostonians say idear, Philadelphiar, Uticar, Saratogar, and so on. It is not because they do not know any better, for they more than others are responsible for our dictionaries which forbid it. The New England dialect is heard in New York, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, though less frequently the farther west we go.

The dialect of the South, that is the old slaveholding territory, is in some respects similar to that of New England. The South has the r difficulty more pronounced, if possible, than the people of Massachusetts, and the difficulty is to be found among all classes, the cultured, the uneducated whites, and the negroes. All say doah, floah, moah, roah, etc. And the Southern man, like the man from Cape Cod, adds a final r to words ending in a vowel sound. Another peculiarity in the Southern speech is stopping short of the g in all words ending in ing. The Southern man says doin, sayin, goin. Again the words ending in en, as broken, spoken, token, and the like, are quite frequently pronounced as if the e in the last syllable were i, thus brokin, spokin, tokin.

The Western dialect is generally spoken in that portion of our country lying north of Mason and Dixon's line, and west of the Alleghanies to the Pacific, except in localities in the northern portion in the New England latitude. In this part of the United States the cultured and uncultured are entirely free from the r difficulty so noticeable in the East and South, except that it is affected by a few. The people of the West are also free from the drawling of certain vowel sounds so common in New England. The Hoosier never says "pail the ceow." Nor is the dropping of the g in words ending in ing so common among the educated people of the West as it is either in the East or South. They are, however, more likely to err in the pronunciation of some of the vowel sounds than are their New England cousins. Too frequently the Western man says institootion, constitootion, and the like. Another vowel sound which is usually mispronounced in the West, even by many educated people, is the

Italian sound of the letter *a*, as in such words as *class*, *pass*, *laugh* ; also the short sound of the letter *o* in such words as *dog*, *log*, and *hog* is by the Western man usually given the longer sound, and the words are pronounced *dawg*, *lawg*, and *hawg*. The dialect of the uncultured of the West is well illustrated by the poetry of Mr. Riley. It is well that Mr. Riley has preserved for future generations what is known as the Hoosier dialect, but which was in fact the dialect of the unlettered throughout the whole western section of our country.

After this specific reference to the various dialect divisions of spoken English both in England and the United States, we may note some of the general differences in the spoken language of the two countries.

It does not take very close observation to detect from his inflection and pronunciation whether one is a native of England or America. Generally speaking the Englishman has less of the nasal tone than the American. The Englishman puts greater stress upon the first syllables ; he generally speaks in a higher key ; his vowel sounds are usually broader. The Englishmen have fallen into the one error little known in this country, that is the *h* difficulty. This, as we have said, does not apply to the educated Englishman. It is said that at least two thirds of the people in Britain do not pronounce the initial *h*. The almost total absence of this defect in American English is perhaps due to the fact that the error grew up since the English settlements were made on this side of the Atlantic. Some have sought to account for it on the theory that languages as they grow older lose the *h* sound. But, if this is the correct reason, why has not the language been affected the same in America as in England ? The history of languages does not justify the statement that a language by age loses the *h* sound. Even in Greek, where there is no letter representing the aspirant, the sound is preserved, and in the written language the breathing is as important as a letter. Just what caused the *h* error in England cannot perhaps be actually known ; it is possibly due to French influence, for the initial *h* in the French language is not usually pronounced ; but it seems certain that this trouble with the English aspirant

has grown up during the last two hundred years. It is only within the last century that the misuse of the letter h has been a subject of ridicule by English critics and men of letters.

The misuse of the letter r which is as grossly incorrect as the h difficulty is perhaps more general in England than in America, although as stated above, in speaking specially of the Southern dialect, it is most noticeable in the southern part of the United States. No lexicographer, so far as I have been able to learn, has ever credited the consonant with but the ordinary and usual r sound. We search in vain through the volumes of poetry written in standard English during the last three centuries to find a single instance where the rhyme or rhythm reveals a second or broken sound of the letter r. Even our recent New England poets, Whittier, Longfellow, and Lowell, who no doubt in their conversation had not overcome the error, never make idea rhyme with fear, nor do they rhyme Noah with door. Just why or when the r difficulty fastened itself upon the speech of so many Englishmen is not known, but I believe in comparatively recent times. The singular feature is that the error is not that alone of the uncultured, but of the educated as well. We find it in the speech of the Harvard or Oxford professor, the farmer of New England, the professional man, the planter, the mountaineer, and the colored man of the South. Some phonologists seek to account for the r difficulty as they have sought to account for the difficulty with the aspirant, by asserting that it has grown up in accordance with a law of philology that the guttural weakens, and the final r disappears as a language grows older. The trouble with this argument is that comparative philology does not seem to reveal any such law; but if it did there would still be unaccounted for the adding of the r where it does not belong, as when our London or Boston friends speak of Indianar. Others have urged that the improper pronunciation of the letter r is due to the influence of the colored race. Now if the difficulty were confined to the southern part of the United States this theory would be plausible, but the improper pronunciation of the letter r is found not only in the South, but in New England and in London. Again it has been asserted that the peculiarity is

wholly due to climatic influences; that the tendency in southern climates is to discard all harsh or guttural sounds; but London is not a southern climate, neither is Maine. So we must conclude as we did in reference to the *h* difficulty, that we do not certainly know.

The fact that the Puritans who settled New England came largely from North England, and that Virginia settlements were made up of people from London and vicinity may account for the primary differences between the New England and Southern dialects. Negro slavery perhaps had more to do with the development of the southern dialect than anything else. The prejudices engendered on account of slavery kept New England literature out of the South. The South had no literature, but adhered to the English standards. As a result there are in the Southern dialect few of the distinctive Americanisms.

The middle West was settled mostly by immigrants from New England, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and North Carolina, and the settlements of the farther West country were dominated in turn by the middle West. How must we account for the development of the Western dialect? Undoubtedly the Germans from Pennsylvania had some influence, but I doubt if as much as some would credit them. One hundred years ago when Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois were settled by immigrants from New England, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and North Carolina, I fancy that the language of those settlers was not so very different from the language spoken by the same classes of people in the West today; that the changes in the spoken English during the last century have not been so much, certainly not more, in the West than in Boston and Richmond; else how can we account for the total absence of the *r* difficulty in the Western section. If all settlers from New England and Virginia pronounced such words as *ford* and *floor* as if spelled *foahd*, *floah*, why have their descendants not retained vestiges of this pronunciation somewhere? I believe the early settlers of the middle West came pronouncing the guttural very much as it is pronounced by the Western people today; that, separated from their former homes by the mountains, there was necessarily in those days very little



communication. The people were poor, and the school teachers were for the most part uncultured. English Grammar was neglected. Later when the study of English was taken up in the schools, the crude English spoken was not taken as the standard of pronunciation, but everything was referred to Webster's dictionary; and as the schools developed the pronunciation grew closer and closer to the standard, until today, as compared with the standards, the best English is spoken by the educated people of the middle West, perhaps in Indiana.

With the increased and increasing facilities for travel, with the good feeling between Great Britain and the United States, there will of necessity follow greater uniformity in the spoken language of all English speaking peoples. When this greater uniformity in spoken English comes, and when later the changes show themselves in the written language, shall it be that the strong rugged guttural of the Anglo Saxon shall have given way to the effeminate, and less forceful sound, or shall spoken English grow towards the standards of written English? The tendency in the West is towards the standards, the tendency in New England and in the South and in London is away from the standards. The best weapon with which to fight the errors of a spoken language is ridicule. Dickens spelled into the speech of Uriah Heap and many other characters the misuse of the aspirant, and the letter is slowly coming back into the speech of the people of London. The whole English speaking world has laughed at the homely dialect of the Hoosier, and the Hoosier is correcting his mistakes. Now if some courageous men of letters would turn their attention to the wuhds, wuhks, idears, Philadelphiars, the Saratogars, of our cousins who are in error, I believe good results would come. A living language must necessarily change, but it should be the desire of those who love our language that the changes may not be at the expense of its Anglo Saxon strength.

CHARLES F. REMY

INDIANAPOLIS